

## REAL CHRISTIANS ARE GROWING CHRISTIANS

It's a tragedy when the growth of a child is stunted in some way.

- a. Imagine a child who, at age 5, just stops growing – physically, intellectually, and emotionally, he just quits developing.
  - ▶ When he's 50 years old he still has the body and mind of a 5 year old.
  - ▶ That would be a terrible tragedy – and you know the parents would do everything they possibly could to find out what's wrong and correct it!
- b. Imagine a child who continues to grow and mature intellectually and emotionally, but his body just never fully develops.
  - ▶ Intellectually and emotionally he's an adult, but he has the body of a 7 or 8 year old.
- c. Imagine a child whose body continues to grow and mature into a full-grown adult body, but intellectually and emotionally he quits developing at a young age.
  - ▶ And even when he gets to be gray-haired and wrinkled he's still thinking and acting like a 10 year old kid.
- d. Or, imagine visiting in a home where there are 2 teenagers and all they eat is baby food.
  - ▶ One of them has never eaten anything but baby food.
  - ▶ The other one used to eat solid food but has gone back to eating baby food.
  - ▶ Wouldn't you think: "This is ridiculous! Something has got to be done!"
- e. When these kinds of things really happen it's a terrible tragedy, and everybody thinks of it as a terrible tragedy – and if it were your child you would do everything you could to find out what's wrong and correct it.
  - ▶ But the spiritual equivalents of these things happen to Christians all the time – and most of us seem to think very little about it.

God intends for every child of His to grow and mature until he achieves his full spiritual potential.

- a. "... we are no longer to be children ... but ... we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ . . ." (Eph 4:14-15, NAS)
- b. "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby ..." (1Pet 2:2)

But think about the fact that a Christian needs to grow in EVERY aspect of spirituality – his spiritual growth needs to be balanced.

- a. The Christian must grow in knowledge, in faith, in love, in zeal, in good works, and in Christ-like character.
  - ▶ 2 Pet 3:18 talks about growing in grace and knowledge: "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pet 3:18, NIV)
  - ▶ 2Th 1:3 talks about growing in faith and brotherly love: "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing" (2Th 1:3, NIV)
  - ▶ Eph 4:15 talks about growing in ALL aspects of Christ-likeness: "... but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ ..." (Eph 4:14-15 (NAS)
- b. It will not do for a Christian to be knowledgeable in God's word but indifferent in the practice of what God's word teaches, or lacking in character.
  - ▶ It won't do for a Christian to be full of faith but unloving toward others, or sour and cynical in disposition.
- c. A normal, healthy Christian is one who is "grow(ing) up in all aspects into ... Christ" (Eph 4:15)
  - ▶ His aim is simply this: "When I grow up (spiritually) I want to be just like Jesus."
  - ▶ "In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Him." (1Jn 4:17, NIV).

In this sermon:

- a. I'm trying to get you to see that when a Christian's spiritual growth is stunted that is also a terrible tragedy – and we ought to do everything we can to find out what's wrong and try to correct it.
- b. I'm trying to get you to think about some of the things that hinder a Christian's spiritual growth.
- c. And, if you realize you're not growing like you should, I will be suggesting some things that will help you to overcome your problem and stimulate your spiritual growth.

## 1. LET'S TALK ABOUT SOME OF THE THINGS THAT CAN HINDER YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH.

### NO REAL SENSE OF PURPOSE

Many Christians don't know what they are supposed to be growing into.

- a. They simply don't know "what they want to be when they grow up."
- b. What is your goal as a Christian while living in this world?

Again, the answer to that question ought to be: "When I grow up (spiritually) I want to be just like Jesus."

- a. "... we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, {even} Christ ..." (Eph 4:14-15, NASB)

I want to be just like Jesus:

- a. In purity of life.
  - ▶ Jesus was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15)
  - ▶ He always said "No" to sin; and I want to say "No" to sin.
- b. In moral courage.
  - ▶ Jesus had the courage to confront and expose the hypocrites and false teachers – no matter who they were.
  - ▶ Example: **Matt 23:1-12** (Jesus talked about the hypocrites, to warn the people); **Matt 23:13-35** (Jesus talked to the hypocrites, to condemn them).
  - ▶ I want to have the kind of moral courage Jesus had.
- c. In compassion and willingness to forgive.
  - ▶ Jesus was always compassionate toward the weak.
    - ∞ Example: His treatment of the woman caught in the very act of adultery.
      - + **Jn 8:2-11** – "Now early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people came to Him; and He sat down and taught them. 3 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, 4 they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. 5 Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?' 6 This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. 7 So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.' 8 And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. 9 Then those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. 10 When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' 11 She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'"
    - ∞ Example: His attitude toward those who nailed Him to the cross.

- + Luke 23:33-34 – “And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. 34 Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’”
- ∞ Jesus could forgive anybody anything – and I want to be like that too.
- d. In determination to do the will of the Father in all things.
  - ▶ “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (Jn 6:38)
  - ▶ “... I do nothing of Myself ... for I always do those things that please Him [the Father, bw] (Jn 8:28-29)
  - ▶ I want to do the Father’s will, too ... in all things

## LACK OF EFFORT

Growing into spiritual maturity in Christ is not something that happens automatically with the passing of time.

- a. The passing of time does not guarantee spiritual growth.
  - ▶ Months and years can pass by without there being any spiritual growth at all.
  - ▶ 5 years, 10 years, 20 years after being baptized you could still be nothing more than a “babe” in Christ.  
Heb 5:12-13 – “For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”
  - ▶ 1Cor 3:1-3a – “And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?”

Real spiritual growth and progress requires effort – diligent effort.

## NOT ENOUGH OF THE RIGHT KIND OF EXERCISE

1Tim 4:7-8 – “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself rather to godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.”

## TOO MANY DISTRACTIONS

Jesus warned about the danger of distractions .

- a. Lk 8:14 – “Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.”
- b. Mk 4:18-19 – “Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, 19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.”

## DISCOURAGING EXPERIENCES

Some people make a good beginning, but get discouraged and quit trying.

- a. There can be many reasons: church troubles, personal problems, lack of encouragement from others, etc.

But consider the example of the apostle Paul:

- a. Few of us will ever have the problems he had (2Cor 11:24-29)
  - ▶ But Paul said, “We do not lose heart” (2Cor 4:16, NKJ, NIV)

- ▶ He said, “We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ...” (2Cor 4:8-9)
  - ∞ Why? Because he knew his labor was not in vain.
    - + 2Cor 4:16 - 5:1 – “Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. 1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”
- ▶ And so he encourages us not to grow weary in doing good.
  - ∞ Gal 6:9 – “And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.”
  - ∞ 1Cor 15:58 – “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

## 2. NOW LET’S TALK ABOUT SOME THINGS THAT WILL HELP US TO GROW AND MATURE SPIRITUALLY.

### UNDERSTANDING THAT SPIRITUAL GROWTH IS NECESSARY TO YOUR SALVATION

Jn 15:1-2 – “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear MORE fruit.”

1Thess 3:12-4:1 – “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 SO THAT He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. 1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.”

1Thess 4:9-10 – “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more (in brotherly love, bw) ...”

2Pet 1:4-11 (NASB) – “by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 5 Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; 6 and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; 7 and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. 8 For IF these qualities are yours AND ARE INCREASING, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; 11 for IN THIS WAY the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.”

### MAKING UP YOUR MIND THAT GROWING AND MATURING INTO A TRULY CHRIST-LIKE PERSON IS WHAT YOU REALLY WANT

Php 3:12-14 – “ ... I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteous- ness which is from God by faith; 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things that are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the up-ward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

## PRACTICING FREQUENT SELF-EXAMINATION

The Lord tells us to practice self-examination: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves ...” (2Cor 13:5)

- a. “Examine” and “Prove” are Present Active Imperative verbs and the meaning is “Keep on examining yourselves” and “Keep on proving yourselves”

Again, Php 3:12 – “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended ...”

- a. When Paul says, in effect, “I have not already attained ... I am not yet perfected” and “I do not consider myself to have apprehended” it is evident he has examined himself in comparison with Christ, and he realizes there is still room for growth.

Here are some questions we should be asking ourselves:

- a. Am I really growing in the Christian virtues Peter talks about in 2Peter, chapter 1? (2Pet 1:5-7)
  - ▶ And – Is my progress and growth evident to everyone who knows me? (1Tim 4:15b)
- b. Do I really know substantially more about God’s word today than I did a year ago?
- c. Am I more diligent in my efforts to teach others about Christ?
- d. Am I improving my disposition?
- e. Am I enjoying life as a child of God?
- f. Am I setting a good example for other Christians?
- g. Am I becoming more like Christ?

## CONCLUSION

It is sad, but true, that many “Christians” are just religious enough to be miserable; but the life of the Christian is intended to be filled with love, joy, peace, and so much more! (Gal 5:22-23)

- a. You need to realize that the blessings God has in store for Christians are for growing Christians.
  - ▶ The good things of the Christian life are for the diligent, not the lazy; they’re for the zealous, not the lukewarm.

Our prayer for one another, and for ourselves, ought to be the same as that of the apostle Paul at the close of his letter to the Christians in Thessalonica: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you COMPLETELY, and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1Th 5:23).